DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 473 515 PS 031 041

TITLE	Afterschool Alert: Poll Report No. 5. A Report of Findings from a August 13-August 21, 2002 Poll of Registered Voters on Afterschool Programs. American Voters: Afterschool Must Remain a Priority.
INSTITUTION	Afterschool Alliance, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Education, Washington, DC.; Open Society Inst., New York, NY.; Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Flint, MI.
PUB DATE	2002-11-00
NOTE	8p.; Additional funding provided by JCPenney Afterschool, the Entertainment Industry Foundation, and the Creative Artists Agency Foundation.
AVAILABLE FROM	The Afterschool Alliance, 1616 H Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006. Web site: http://www.afterschoolalliance.org. For full text: http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/school_poll_final_2002.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adolescents; *After School Education; *After School Programs; Children; Educational Attitudes; Elementary Secondary Education; Financial Support; *Latchkey Children; National Surveys; *Public Opinion; Public Support
IDENTIFIERS	Availability (Programs and Services)

ABSTRACT

Noting that despite new national priorities vying for attention and tax dollars, voters continue to support after-school programs, this brief summarizes key findings from a 2002 nation-wide poll regarding support and need for after-school programming. Participating in the poll were 800 adults over age 18 who are registered to vote. Among the findings highlighted in the brief are the following: (1) nine in ten American voters continue to believe daily, quality after-school programs are a necessity; (2) nearly six in ten of voters disagree with President Bush's proposal to not increase federal funding for after-school programs; (3) 72 percent believe after-school programs are an absolute necessity for their communities; (4) 90 percent of parents who say they are not home in the afternoon when their children return from school describes after-school programs as an absolute necessity; (4) 63 percent of voters are concerned that there will not be new after-school programs and that some existing programs may have to reduce services or close their doors if no new federal funds are available; (5) after-school programs are among the top five education priorities that voters want protected from state budget cuts; and (6) safety and crime prevention were major factors underlying voter support for after-school programs. (HTH)

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The Afterschool Alliance

November 2002

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AFTERSCHOOL ALERT POLL REPORT

No. 5

Afterschool Alliance

Funding provided by the C.S. Mott Foundation and JCPenney Afterschool

A Report on Findings of the 2002 Nationwide Poll of Registered Voters on Afterschool Programs

American Voters: Afterschool Must Remain a Priority

Year of turmoil does not shake belief that afterschool programs help keep kids safe, improve academic achievement, and help working families

Last summer it was the economy. As the 2001 afterschool survey hit the field, the electorate was beginning to feel the impact of a stuttering economy. Would the economic pinch impact voter support for afterschool programs? It didn't happen. More than nine in ten voters—for the fourth consecutive year—remained committed to the importance of providing these programs for America's youth.

But that was last summer and, compared to 2002, last year's polling environment was a dream. Over the past year, voters have endured significantly more severe economic swings, terrorist attacks, military responses, corporate corruption, and heightened anxiety about the safety of our nation and our families—enough upset to erode even the most venerable national institutions. So how would afterschool fare in *this* environment?

For the fifth year, across age, race, gender, religion, education and party affiliation, nine in ten Americans continue to support afterschool programs and the benefits they provide. Americans continue to believe that afterschool programs keep kids safe. Parents, especially those with children currently enrolled in afterschool programs, continue to be strong and consistent advocates for afterschool. Even in tough economic times, especially at the state level, afterschool programs continue to be seen as something that voters want and need.

But another message emerged strongly from voters in this year's poll. Despite the new national priorities vying for their attention and their tax dollars, voters signal that they want to protect the investment that has already been made in afterschool programs. They do not want to see existing programs close or services cut. Instead, they want to preserve funding and ensure quality of programs.

For afterschool advocates the message is that, even with new concerns and national priorities, Americans want safe, enriching activities for children and youth during the hours after school. And Americans—especially parents—do not want to take any steps backwards on afterschool programs as the nation seeks to meet new challenges.

Key Findings

American voters continue to believe daily, quality afterschool programs are a necessity.

- Nine in ten voters (90 percent) believe that there is a need for some type of organized activity or place where children can go after school every day that provides opportunities to learn.
- Nearly six in ten voters (59 percent) disagree with President Bush's proposal to not increase federal funding for afterschool programs in 2003.

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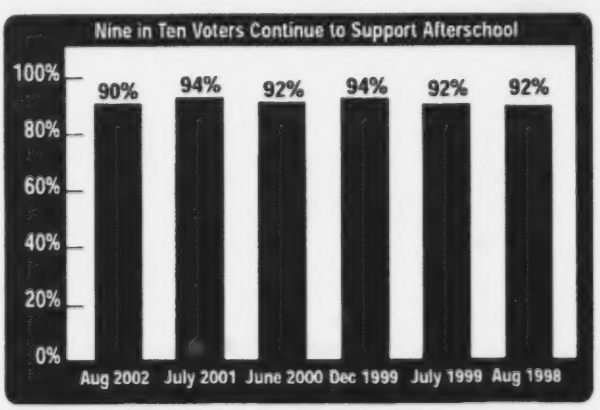

The findings discussed in this publication are based on a nationwide survey of 800 adults, 18 years of age or older, who are registered voters. The poll was conducted August 13–21, 2002 by the polling firms of Lake Snell Perry & Associates and The Tarrance Group. The margin of error for this poll is +/-3.5 percent.

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Key Findings, continued

- Nine in ten voters (93 percent) who believe their states are facing serious budget deficits still agree that there should be some type of organized activity after school every day.
- Seven in ten voters (72 percent) believe afterschool programs are an absolute necessity for their communities.
- Nine in ten parents (90 percent) who say they are not home in the afternoon when their children return from school describe afterschool programs as an absolute necessity.
- Seven in ten voters (70 percent) say it is important to them personally to ensure access to afterschool programs for all children; half of those voters say it is very important to them personally to ensure access.

American voters are concerned about protecting existing programs.

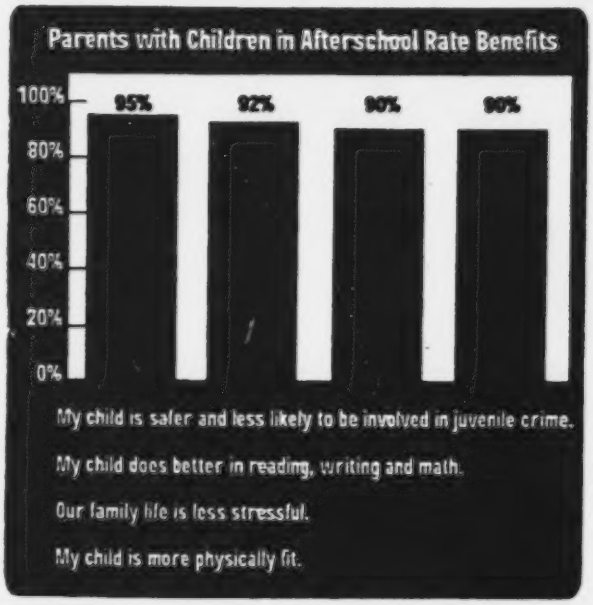
- Voters believe parents of school-age children, their school boards, their communities and themselves are "very" and "somewhat" committed to quality afterschool programs. However, less than half of voters believe the President (40 percent), their U.S. Senators (45 percent) or their U.S. Representatives (40 percent) are "very" or "somewhat" committed to afterschool.
- Six in ten voters (63 percent) are concerned that there will not be new afterschool programs and some existing programs may have to reduce their services or close their doors if no new federal funds are allocated.
- Afterschool programs are among the top five education priorities that voters want protected from state budget cuts. The other four areas are teacher pay, early childhood education, reducing class size, and training for teachers.

Americans believe afterschool programs, more than ever, play a significant role in keeping kids safe.

- Nine in ten parents (95 percent) with children currently in afterschool programs say their children are "safer and less likely to be involved in juvenile crime than children who are not in afterschool programs." Ninety-two percent of these parents say their children do "better in reading, writing and math since attending an afterschool program." Ninety percent of these parents say their children are more physically fit and agree their family life is less stressful.
- Nearly eight in ten voters (78 percent), both parents and non-parents, believe that afterschool programs are effective at keeping kids safe from crime.

"Even in these times when voters are facing shrinking paychecks and budget deficits, they still see afterschool [programs] as a necessity."

—Alysia Snell, Vice President, Lake, Snell, Perry & Associates



Voters Concerned About Funding, Commitment, Safety

Voters are concerned that afterschool programs not be left behind as the nation seeks to fund and implement new priorities.

Respondents acknowledge that there are other spending priorities including guaranteeing health care, protecting Social Security and Medicare, reducing taxes and fighting terrorism. However, voters disagree with the proposal by President Bush to keep federal funding for afterschool programs (21st Century Community Learning Centers) at the same level in 2003 as in 2002. Respondents—both parents and non-parents—are most concerned about the safety of children and youth if afterschool programs are closed, with more than 50 percent expressing some safety concern.

Respondents want and expect public officials to step up to the plate to support afterschool programs and to demonstrate their commitment. In addition to parents, communities and businesses, public officials at the local level including school board members, mayors and state

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representatives rated highest among respondents as being committed to quality afterschool programs. However, public officials at the federal level have the most work to do in demonstrating their commitment to afterschool to voters, including the President, U.S. Senators and U.S. Representatives.

In view of these priorities and these players, the key message is that voters expect their elected officials, especially at the federal level, to be working to ensure that current afterschool programs have a fighting chance to continue providing services to children.

Safety Viewed as Key Benefit

Questions about voters' beliefs regarding afterschool and its impact on safety have always been part of this survey. However, responses to this year's questions took on added significance in an atmosphere of overall heightened concern about national security.

Of four types of programs being used in various parts of the country to increase safety and lower juvenile crime, afterschool programs rated highest among voters as being perceived to keep kids safe from crime. Nearly half of those voters said that afterschool programs were "very" effective. Afterschool rated ahead of mentoring programs, violence prevention programs taught in the classroom, and gang outreach and prevention programs (see chart on page 4).

Six in ten voters (64 percent) would be likely to support quality afterschool programs if children who attend those programs are "less likely to commit a juvenile crime or be a victim of crime." Voters are also likely to support programs if children who participate are "less likely to use drugs" (63 percent), "more likely to remain in school" (62 percent) and "less likely to become teen parents" (61 percent).

Is it reasonable for respondents to link afterschool programs so closely with safety and related outcomes? According to recent research and reports from afterschool programs themselves, the answer is yes.

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, a bipartisan, nonprofit anti-crime organization led by police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, victims of violence and leaders of police officer associations, has found through a series of studies

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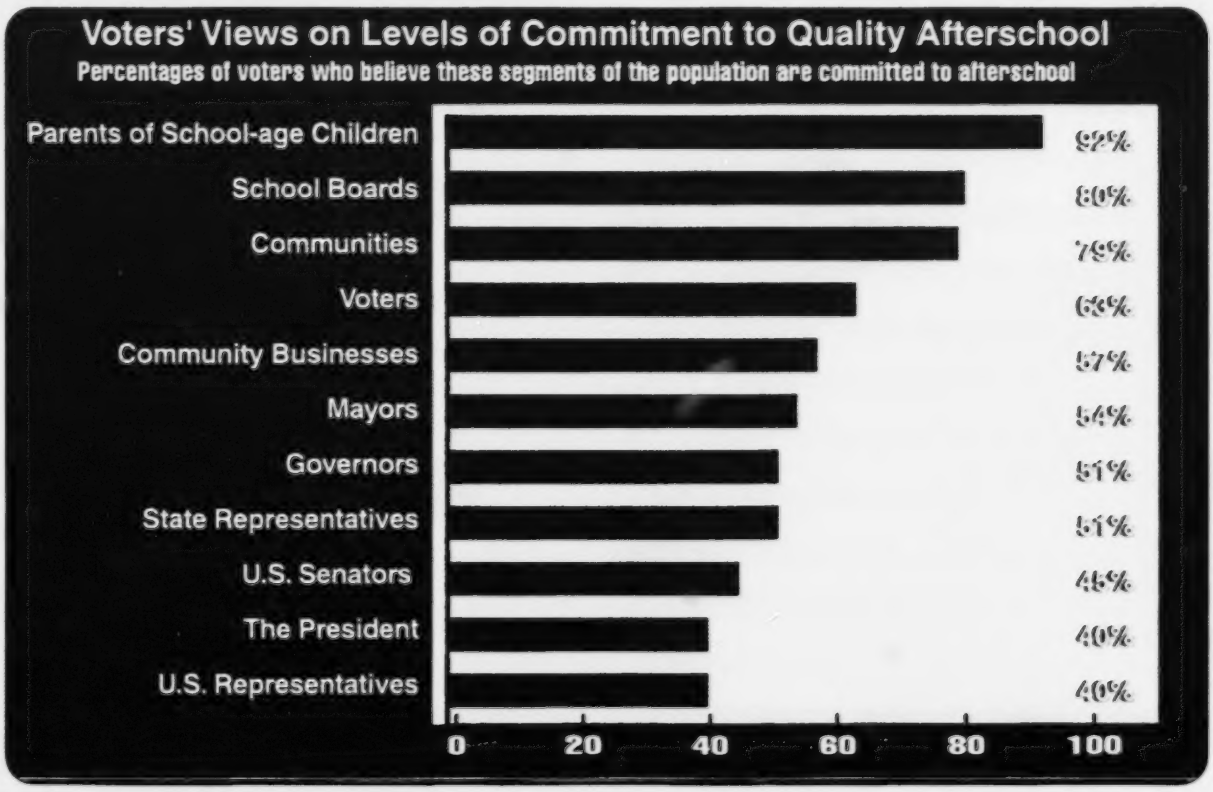
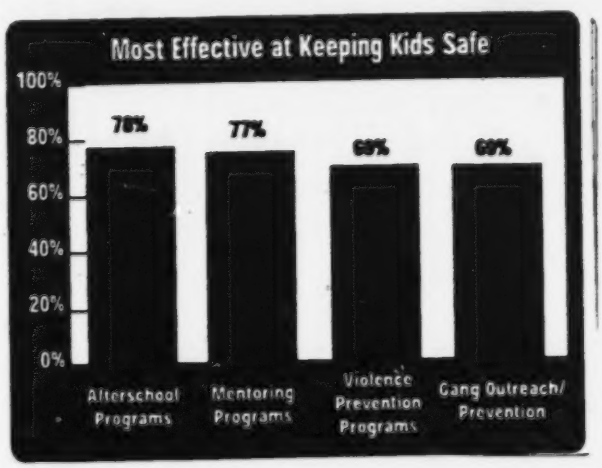


that violent juvenile crime is most likely to occur between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m., and that youth are more likely to engage in risky behaviors—smoke, drink, or do drugs—during these hours.

In its latest study conducted among afterschool program participants in New York State, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids found that, when comparing teens who had adult supervision five days a week after school with teens who had no adult supervision three or more days a week, there was a dramatic difference in involvement in crime. Those teens who were unsupervised three or more days a week were four times more likely to have committed a crime. And, compared to teens supervised the entire week, those who were unsupervised three or more days a week had smoked, drank alcohol, had sex and used drugs two to four times more often.[1]

The link between crime risk and the hours after school is well documented. The link between afterschool programs and their ability to reduce risk and increase positive experience often comes from the programs themselves:

◇ Iola, Kansas has seen a significant reduction in juvenile crime since the beginning of the SAFE BASE afterschool program in 2000, a 21st Century Community Learning Center. In the first quarter of 2001, only 21 juvenile crimes were committed, compared to 69 juvenile crimes that were committed in the same quarter in 2000.[2]



As a law enforcement officer for the City of Iola, the only reason that I can [attribute] to why the number of crimes being committed in our community by juveniles has reduced is due to the implementation of the SAFE BASE program.

–Thomas L. Rousch, Community Resource Officer, Iola Police Department

◇ The Blossom Program in Bedford-Stuyvesant, New York provides activities and mentoring after school to girls who are considered "at-risk" for gang activity. The program provides a supportive environment and supervised activities that include community service, computer labs, physical fitness or other activities which interest youth. Since its inception in 2000, the program has served 90 youth and has seen several participants improve their academic success and go on to college.[3]

I was bad. I was always in trouble—fighting, talking back to teachers....I didn't intend to finish school, but my guidance counselor introduced me to Isis (creator of Blossom), and I came to Blossom.

–Blossom Participant

◇ Youth in Vancouver, Washington can turn to the Boys & Girls Club of Southwest Washington for a safe place after school. The Club is housed at an elementary school and provides activities such as cooking, art and homework help. The local police department credits the Club with a reduction in crime—in the first year of the Club's operation, juvenile crime decreased 45 percent in a nearby apartment complex.[4]

The program is about learning and having a safe place to be because so many kids don't have that in the rest of their lives.

–Becky Shipman, parent

In these times when all are being asked to play a role—large or small—in securing our nation, afterschool programs help assure parents that their children are safe during the critical after school hours.

[1] *Mason-Dixon Polling and Research, April 2002, Fight Crime-Invest in Kids: New York State Teen Survey, Columbia, MD.*

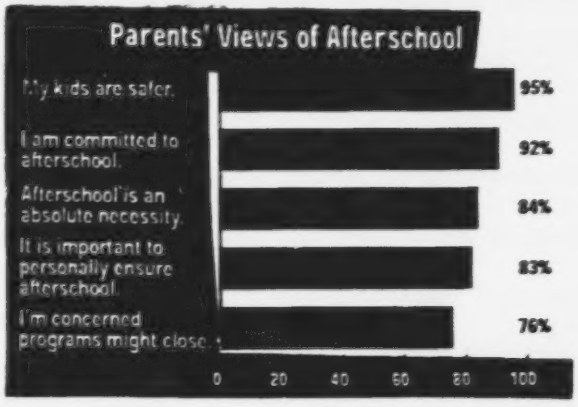
[2] *Iola Police Department, Iola, Kansas, "Juvenile Crimes: City of Iola" 31 March 2001.*

[3] *Shelby, Joyce, "Helping Girls to Blossom: After-School Program Gets High Marks," Daily News (New York), 17 March 2002.*

[4] *Middlewood, Erin, "Club Clicks With Kids, Keeps Crime Down," The Columbian (Vancouver, WA), 21 March 2002.*

Special Focus: Parents

Survey respondents continue to view parents—whether or not their children currently are enrolled in afterschool—as key stakeholders in ensuring access to afterschool programs and to promoting their benefits. Survey respondents who are parents themselves corroborate these beliefs with strong responses on afterschool programs that have grown more revealing with each year's survey.



- More than nine in ten parents (95 percent) with children currently in afterschool agree that their children are "safer and less likely to be involved in juvenile crime than children who are not in afterschool programs."
- More than nine in ten voters (92 percent) believe parents of school-age children are committed to quality afterschool programs, with 53 percent of those parents very committed. Parents rate highest at level of commitment over school board members (80 percent).
- More than eight in ten parents (84 percent) of children 18 or younger say afterschool programs are an absolute necessity compared to 67 percent of voters without children ages 18 or younger. Mothers and fathers respond in relatively equal numbers—86 percent yes, mothers; 81 percent, fathers.
- More than eight in ten parents (83 percent) with children ages 18 or younger say that ensuring access to afterschool programs is personally important to them.
- Nearly eight in ten parents (76 percent) are concerned that existing afterschool programs would likely reduce services or close their doors if federal funding is not increased in 2003.
- Seven in ten parents (71 percent) disagree with a federal budget that does not increase funding for afterschool programs in 2003 beyond its current level.
- Nine in ten parents (90 percent) who say they are not home in the afternoon when their children return from school describe afterschool programs as an absolute necessity; 82 percent of parents who say they are home in the afternoon describe afterschool as an absolute necessity.
- Compared to last year's findings, parents of older children are more likely to recognize the necessity of afterschool programs than parents of younger children, although all groups agree that afterschool programs are a necessity. Eighty-one percent of parents of children under six say afterschool programs are a necessity; 84 percent of parents of children ages 6–12; and 86 percent of parents of children ages 13–18.

Conclusion

Afterschool support faced a very different environment this year. However, in spite of new national concerns, nine in ten Americans continue to support quality afterschool programs. In spite of states facing serious budget deficits, voters want afterschool to be protected from budget cuts.

Voters are most likely to support an afterschool program when they learn of its potential for keeping kids safe and away from abusive behaviors.

Voters want funding for afterschool protected. They are concerned that afterschool programs that exist now in their communities may have to reduce services or close their doors if federal funding for 2003 is kept at the current level.

Parents continue to be the strongest and most consistent supporters of afterschool programs throughout the survey, and not only those with children currently enrolled in afterschool. It is clear that whether parents have children either approaching afterschool age or beyond, they recognize the positive impact that afterschool program participation has on the youth of their communities.

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JCPenney afterschool

JCPenney Afterschool is committed to providing children with high-quality, affordable afterschool programs to help them reach their full potential. JCPenney Afterschool provides financial and volunteer support to five of America's leading afterschool advocates: the YMCA of the USA, the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, 4-H, Junior Achievement, and the Afterschool Alliance. This support helps provide safe, fun and educational afterschool programs and raises awareness of the need for more such programs across the country.

To learn more, visit :

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Afterschool Alliance

The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization supported by a group of public, private, and nonprofit entities dedicated to ensuring that all children and youth have access to afterschool programs by 2010. The Alliance is proud to count among its founding partners the C.S. Mott Foundation, U.S. Department of Education, JCPenney Afterschool, Open Society Institute/The After-School Corporation, the Entertainment Industry Foundation, and the Creative Artists Agency Foundation.

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